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## RETHINKING INTERNATIONAL BORDER-CROSSING:

### A CONSIDERATION OF LGBTQ TEACHING EXPERIENCES

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Globalization has yielded an increasing number of opportunities to cross national borders for work purposes, and teachers are among some of the mobile professionals who can now take advantage of working in different countries. Teaching internationally offers a promising chance to expand professional horizons by strengthening teachers' experiences, fostering flexibility, facilitating constructivist pedagogies and intercultural awareness, encouraging reflection (e.g., on adaptation), developing sensitivity to the cultural and linguistic differences of students, enabling social agency, and reconceptualizing notions of "justice" and "equality" across various societies (Moura, 2017). However, despite the expansion of personal and professional understandings and skills, there emerges a stark reality for teachers of LGBTQ backgrounds who cross borders to work internationally: they may find themselves in contexts where being LGBTQ is outlawed.

*Out There: A Study of LGBTQ Educators Working Overseas* is a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)-sponsored study that seeks to document and alleviate some of the concerns that arise in overseas teaching contexts for LGBTQ educators (such as teachers of English as an additional/foreign language, visiting professors, or employees in international schools). Our research seeks to understand the ways in which LGBTQ teachers working overseas negotiate their personal and professional contexts and the impact of gender,

sexuality, and other identity characteristics on their experiences. Study participants will be interviewed by members of the research team and will receive a camera to take photos of public spaces that are meaningful to the teachers as they cross borders. The research team will then work with the study participants to discuss what photos are meaningful to them. We plan to mount an art gallery exhibition at the conclusion of the project profiling some of the images taken by the study participants.

Principal investigator Robert Mizzi (2015), a researcher at the University of Manitoba, contends that while considerable awareness exists of the personal and social challenges of working in a different country, very little is known about the work and learning situations involving LGBTQ international teachers in places where homophobia and/or transphobia is socially legitimized and legally permissible. This lack of awareness may explain why there have been reports of job termination of LGBTQ international educators due to their identity-difference (for example, see Martin, 2012; Parry, 2014). As a result, there are different social perceptions toward, and negotiation strategies specific to, each subset identity of being LGBTQ; these strategies are also influenced by personal agency and other intersecting elements of identity such as racialized and socioeconomic positions. For example, a Canadian black lesbian may experience marginalization based on race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Trying to solve the issue by endorsing employment opportunities for *everyone*, without explicit discussion of their identities, does not secure the intercultural experience for LGBTQ teachers. It only stresses that for them to succeed professionally, they have to be willing to conform to standardized norms that privilege and legitimize only particular identity positions (Schmidt & Gagné, 2014). This phenomenon of conformity and assimilation being valued in the teaching profession is well-documented by study co-investigator Clea Schmidt in her research on

internationally educated teachers' (IETs) attempts to resume their careers in Canada, where linguistic and cultural diversity among IETs tends to be devalued. In the case of the current research, the teacher positioning and identity being privileged relates to heterosexuality, which often means educators must keep non-heterosexual and transgender identities a secret. The results of maintaining secrecy can be increased sick leave, cultural isolation, job attrition, dissatisfaction with the work and personal life, and an internalized sense of shame. Living in secret also sustains a status quo whereby heterosexuality remains a normative value of school operations and school personnel interactions.

On the one hand, educating stakeholders about sexual and gender diversity can generate and broaden new understandings of human diversity in general. This type of awareness means that international school administrators can support their LGBTQ employees and therefore create a more fulsome diverse and respectful workplace, and create the conditions for the development of comprehensive intercultural education. On the other hand, schools and colleges might be unable to broach such discussions due to staunch social values, cultural conventions espousing conformity, and homophobic legislation. Therefore, the concern is that in educational contexts worldwide the gifts, skills, and understandings that LGBTQ educators contribute to school life be respected, while these teachers are not placed in harm's way. The Out There project is expected to help address this urgent need.

Participant recruitment for the Out There Study is taking place now, and interested study participants can confidentially contact us through [www.outthereresearch.ca](http://www.outthereresearch.ca). To watch a video about the project, please visit: <http://bit.ly/2FOBwrt>.

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